

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS FROM NW GRAND PUBLIC MEETING  
April 29, 2002, 6:00 PM, West Valley Art Museum

The following questions and answers were recorded during Dave French's presentations on the recommended options for the Grand Avenue Northwest Corridor:

Mayor Shafer: Lives can be lost enroute to Del Webb Hospital waiting 15 minutes for a train to pass. "How much is a life worth?" We need grade separations at the hospitals.

A: The study tentatively recommends two grade separations, but no funding is currently available. Where will the money come from? Can Surprise contribute?

Q: Would the railroad help pay for these grade separations?

A: Probably not, although the railroad will pick up a 5% share for elimination of at-grade crossings. Local funding is the key.

Q: How high a priority are the proposed grade separations?

A: They are priority 3 (lowest) because of their high cost. Four grade separations will cost more than all the other improvements combined.

Q: What's the estimated cost of the whole package?

A: The costs haven't been totaled yet, but the grade separations are roughly \$40 million each. The mainline widening plus minor roadway improvements are \$30-\$40 million total.

Q: How much of this package is funded?

A: None yet. The MAG Regional Council following the completion of the MAG RTP next year will make funding decisions. Dave summarized the MAG programming process.

Mayor Shafer: How will Grand Avenue improvements east of 101 help in the Surprise area?

A: They will substantially reduce overall travel times on Grand, as the portion east of Loop 101 is the most congested with the longest delays.

Q: Why has there been no action yet, despite ten years of studies?

A: No improvement plan has been adopted for this segment. A 1997 corridor study from Van Buren Street to Loop 303 deferred any decision on the segment west of 101.

Q: Who's funding the eight grade separations east of 101?

A: ADOT.

Q: So why doesn't ADOT fund improvements farther west?

A: ADOT may fund widening and partially fund some grade separations, based on recommendations of this study.

Q: How will Grand connect to I-17?

A: Future Loop 303 will probably connect to I-17 via the Lone Mountain Corridor. There will be no direct connection of Grand to I-17 at the Phoenix end.

Q: Who's funding this study?

A: MAG, with federal planning funds covering part of the cost.

Q: Since Grand is a US highway, doesn't that make it eligible for federal funding?

A: Grand is eligible for federal funds, but no more so than many other routes that lack a US highway designation. Federal money for Grand Avenue improvements would come out of the pre-established total available to the region.

Q: How does this study affect the highway west of 303?

A: In a separate project, ADOT is widening US 60 to a four-lane divided facility from 303 to Morristown.

Q: As a major highway, can Grand Avenue provide safe transportation for nuclear waste enroute to Yucca Mountain?

A: Urban freeways like Loop 303 would take through traffic off Grand and offer safer routes for hazardous materials.

Q: Can hazardous materials be rerouted west of the White Tanks to avoid populated areas?

A: MAG has identified a route for the CANAMEX Corridor west of the White Tanks. However, this route is a very long-term project, because it would be costly to build but carry little traffic.

Q: Why is ADOT spending money on the Wickenburg bypass while ignoring CANAMEX?

Unlike other states, Arizona has no designated routes for hazardous materials. CANAMEX may never be built.

A: Freeways are the safest roads, so funding and completion of 303 are important. Loop 303 would remove about 15,000 vehicles per day from Grand.

Comment from Audience: 303 is a two-lane interim road—not a freeway suitable for hazardous materials.

A: True. It is not funded or built yet as a higher level facility.

Comment from Audience: The Sun Valley Parkway could solve the problem. Connect the Sun Valley Parkway to US 60 at SR 74.

Comment from Audience: Let's get back to Grand Avenue

Q: How long has the project development process on US 60 from I-17 to Loop 101 lasted?

A: About five years so far. The original corridor study was done in 1997, followed by the MIS in 1999. Four grade separations are now in final engineering, two are in construction, and two are in right-of-way acquisition.

Q: What will be the height of the raised median west of the Agua Fria River?

A: Curb height.

Q: Is additional funding needed to complete Loop 303?

A: Yes, either an extension of the ½ cent freeway sales tax or some other dedicated source.

Q: What is the priority of Loop 303?

A: It is not part of the existing sales tax program, but could receive the highest priority (along with the South Mountain Freeway) for funding from an extension of the tax as they are already on the map to be done, they just need funding. Other studies in progress will identify other needs that will compete for funds however. The RTP process will make the final decisions.

Q: How would the proposed El Mirage/Thompson Ranch grade separation affect the Agua Fria River and adjoining landfill?

A: The suggested alignment passes west of the river and landfill.

Q: For grade separations, wouldn't bridges be more economical than underpasses?

A: Bridges may be cheaper in some cases, but they must clear the railroad track (which already has a raised profile) by 23.5 feet. This would result in more property takings and disruption, since a greater vertical separation requires a longer structure.

Comment from Audience: Is this more hindsight than foresight?

A: Yes. Problem could have been solved in 1960s, when the Sun Cities were being created.

Q: Who controls the signals on Grand Avenue and Bell Road?

A: ADOT has the ultimate authority on Grand, although local governments typically request the signals. Local jurisdictions have authority over Bell Road.

Q: Why has ADOT allowed so many new signals on Grand in the last few years?

A: The signals were requested by local governments and met ADOT standards for spacing.

Q: Is this project studying the Loop 303 extension to I-17?

A: That's a separate study with ADOT.

Q: Is more information on the 303 study available?

A: The study is just starting so there's not much information. See staff to get on the mailing list.

Q: Has the project team done a cost comparison with lowering the railroad tracks throughout the corridor?

A: No, but the cost would be very high, especially because the railroad would have to remain in operation while a trench is constructed. River crossings are another problem.

Q: Wasn't the interim Loop 303 facility supposed to be completed to Lake Pleasant Road by June 2002?

A (from MCDOT): Construction from Grand Avenue to Lake Pleasant Road will occur in two phases starting this year. Dave French: Peoria will improve Lake Pleasant Road to serve as a temporary 303 extension.

Q: Are the proposed underpasses in floodplains?

A: All have a drainage way that needs to be dealt with. 107<sup>th</sup> Avenue is the approximate dividing line between the Agua Fria and New River drainages.

Q: Why not punch more arterials through for longer distances, thus relieving congestion and providing more direct travel routes?

A: Some communities, such as Sun City West, were designed to block through traffic. As an example, the community killed a proposal to tie Deer Valley Drive into Loop 303 north of Grand. On the other hand, MAG (in the Northwest Valley study) and several communities are evaluating their future roadway development needs.

Rejoinder: Why not reroute people instead of overloading Grand? We need to bite the bullet and build more roads.

Q: We've heard that nothing will be done to El Mirage Road until the large developers to the north start developing. Some 100,000 homes are proposed.

A (from County staff): The first priority for the County is Loop 303. Then El Mirage Road.